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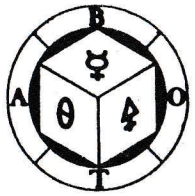
TAROT FUNDAMENTALS

Lesson No. 34



BUILDERS OF THE ADYTUM

TAROT FUNDAMENTALS

Lesson Thirty-four

THE DEVIL

The black background of Key 15 represents darkness, a symbol of ignorance. It refers also to Saturn, the planet ruling Capricorn. The color black, especially in heraldry, stands for this planet.

The central figure is an androgyne goat having the wings of a bat, the arms and hands of a man and the legs and feet of an eagle. The wings refer to the designation of the Devil as "prince of the power of the air". They indicate a subtle energy in the atmosphere which energy is one of the powers controlled by practical occultists.

The eagle's legs and feet refer to the sign Scorpio, ruled by Mars, which planet is exalted in Capricorn. The Scorpio forces must be purified in the fires of test and trial if we are to be released from bondage.

The arms and hands of the monster are shown in a gesture resembling that made by the Magician. The difference is that the uplifted hand is open and bears on its palm the astrological symbol of Saturn, which signifies limitation.

The position of the fingers of the Devil's right hand is also a contrast to the gesture of esotericism made by the Hierophant. The Devil seems to be saying, "What is visible, what can be grasped by the senses, is all there is."

This is the basic fallacy of materialism. In the symbolism of the Devil's hand, this fallacy is associated with the sign of the planet Saturn, because materialism is the cause of man's worst limitations.

The inverted torch in the Devil's left hand burns wastefully and gives little light. It is typical of the false light of misinterpretation of experience. It represents also the blazing torch of revolution and rebellion. (Remember that Civil Rights, the cornerstone of our democracy, emerged as a practical concept from rebellions against feudal lords in the days of King John. Evil, symbolized by the Devil in Key 15, is often, if indeed not always, the womb of progress. Ed.)

On the Devil's body, just below the naval, a symbol of Mercury refers to the activity of the subtle processes of digestion and assimilation. These, under the influence of Mercury in Virgo, are brought under control in the work of practical occultism. This work is a

combination of mental processes, indicated by the yellow upper half of the Mercury symbol, with bodily responses or actions represented by the red cross forming the lower half of the symbol.

The Devil's eyes are red because Mars, corresponding to that color, is exalted in the sign Capricorn. They emphasize the meanings of the letter Ayin, and refer also to the fact that sight is attributed to the letter Heh, and thus to Aries, a sign ruled by Mars.

The inverted pentagram between the Devil's horns is the most evil of all signs of black magic. The essence of black magic is mental inversion, rooted in the belief that the Self of man is dominated by the elements composing his physical environment. Thus the inverted pentagram is a symbol of falsehood because it is never true that Spirit can be dominated by matter.

The pedestal is a half-cube, representing imperfect understanding of the physical world, because this world is often symbolized by a cube. At the front of the pedestal is a large ring. To it are fastened the chains which bind the two smaller figures.

These typify the human conscious and subconscious minds. The bondage of delusion is a consequence of man's erroneous interpretation of the nature of the physical universe. The hoofs, horns and tails of these prisoners intimate that delusion bestializes man.

On the Cube of Space, Key 15 is represented by the line West-Below, shown in Figs. 1 and 2 of the diagrams accompanying Lesson 18. This line connects the lower ends of the lines North-West and South-West. It designates an activity working at the subconscious level. It is the lower boundary of the western face of the Cube, and is also the western boundary of the lower face.

Considered under the first of these two aspects, it represents the operation at work on subconscious levels of manifestation, of what is shown in Key 10. Considered under the second of these two aspects, it represents the subconscious element in the Law of Rotation.

Actually, these are simply two ways of describing one and the same activity. Hence they are represented on the Cube by the single line of West-Below.

In terms of Tarot, Key 15 shows how the power represented by the High Priestess manifests itself in the Law of Rotation and shows also those aspects of this Law which operate in the universe and in the life of man below the level of conscious awareness.

The current of energy in this line moves from North to South. It combines the current passing from East to West along the line of North-Below with the current passing from Above to Below along the line North-West.

Key 15 therefore represents an activity which combines the forces of Key 9 with those of Key 11. Here is an important clue to the practical meaning of Key 15. It shows us that whatever is represented by the symbolism of the Devil combines the secret forces of Virgo and Libra.

The line West-Below is opposite the line East-Below. The latter is related to the Chariot and to the sign Cancer, which is the opposite zodiacal sign to Capricorn. Capricorn in turn corresponds to the line West-Below. Furthermore, the line West-Below is **diagonally** opposite the line East-Above, and we have seen that there is a hint of this opposition in the symbolism of Keys 6 and 15.

In practical occultism, Key 15 represents a force which combines the energy released into the physical organism through the functions of the Virgo region, as explained in Lessons 21 and 22, with the force specialized by the adrenals governed by Libra.

In one sense, all these forces are really phases in the operation of the One Force. Yet each phase is distinct and has its own peculiarities. As an illustration of the same general principle, we may think of the One Force as electricity which may be specialized through appropriate instruments into various kinds of activity. Passing through the filament of an electric bulb, it manifests as light. Sent through the coil of a stove, it becomes heat. One manifestation enables us to read at night. The other warms a room, or cooks a meal. We do not try to read by the light of a stove, nor cook a dinner over an electric lamp.

To speak of anything so obvious may seem out of place in a course of lessons intended for the instruction of intelligent men and women. Yet it is necessary because so many appear to believe that one needs only to make contact with the central source of the One Force in order to accomplish all things. Again and again we have been asked what good there is in "all this technical knowledge". Often the question is put by a person describing himself as an "advanced student" who has spent years reading occult literature and has been a member of one or more "very occult" societies.

Failure to grasp this principle accounts for the lack of success attending the efforts of many genuinely earnest students. It needs to be said often that **practical** occultism is just as full of inevitable technicalities as practical **exoteric** science. Our conquest of the inner world of occult forces is made by the same kind of procedure which has brought about our conquest of the outer world.

In Seven Steps, Lesson 1, is a quotation from Eliphas Levi describing the Astral Light. Add to it these words from the same author:

"This electro-magnetic ether, this vital and luminous caloric, is represented on ancient monuments by the girdle of Isis, which twines in a love-knot round two poles, by the bull-headed serpent, by the serpent with the head of a goat or a dog, and by the serpent biting its own tail, emblem of prudence and of Saturn. It is the winged dragon of Medea, the double

serpent of the caduceus, and the tempter of Genesis. Lastly, it is the devil of exoteric dogmatism, and is really the blind force which souls must conquer in order to detach themselves from the chains of earth."

Now, in Genesis the tempter is called נחש, Nachash, and this noun is closely related to the word translated in the Authorized Version as "brass", though it really means copper, the metal of Venus. The number of נחש is 358, the same as the number of משיח, Messiach or Messiah, "the anointed", and referring to the Christos.

What is hinted by this numeral identity? The agency of temptation and that of release are one and the same. The Life-Power is the cause both of bondage and of liberation. When we do not understand them, the laws of the Life-Power's self-expression seem to be our adversaries. When we come to know that all manifestation proceeds from the One Identity, we discover that a reversal of relationship is possible, so that what seems to be against us is transformed into the means for our release from all restriction.

When Eliphas Levi speaks of the Astral Light as **blind**, he employs a subtlety of language. The force is blind only so long as we are unaware of its true nature. When we ourselves see the truth, this force becomes the vehicle of our vision. Hence it is connected with Ayin, the Eye.

The secret of release is to get the pentagram right side up. Man's monstrous imaginary creation, the Devil, is really none other than God as God seems to men who have an upside-down conception of the I AM. To know what the Self of man really is dispels the delusion that Spirit is dominated by the elements. When this delusion is overcome, the powerlessness of evil becomes self-evident and the works of the Devil are destroyed.

Learn to laugh at appearances. Laugh at the notion of a Devil. The most effective resistance to error is ridicule. Laugh at the Devil and he, with all his angels, will flee.

MIRTH, THE SOLVENT

The Hebrew noun שחוק sehkoke, is attributed to the letter Ayin. It means laughter, mirth, derision and sport or play. The practical instruction to follow emphasizes this idea.

One has only to look at Key 15 to see that this assemblage of incongruities is ridiculous. Incongruity is one of the fundamental causes of mirth. Nearly every one of the seven basic jokes owes its laugh-provoking quality to some such mixture of unrelated things. When things **look** like the Devil, laughter puts us more quickly in the right mood to find a correct solution than any amount of seriousness.

Thus it is recorded of Abraham Lincoln that, when the Northern cause was in greatest difficulties, he shocked the staid members of his cabinet by reading them the latest humorous essay by Artemas Ward. Often in the midst of grave and perilous times Lincoln would lift his own spirits and those of his associates with stories which were of the "smoking-compartment" variety.

Voltaire tells us that when men believe in absurdities, they inevitably commit atrocities. The truth of this statement is far reaching. You can trace the disastrous effects of our past and current beliefs in absurdities through virtually every field of our activities—political, economic, religious and social. The Devil and all he stands for is an absurdity. The only antidote to absurdity is reality. The Great Work, the goal of all true aspirants, is the gaining of the needed perceptions and abilities to discover, accept and apply Reality in all our thoughts and actions.

Remember, this whole Key is related to appearances, to the way things look, to outward shows. Appearances deceive when we are so ignorant as to take them at face value. When we do this they slander us to ourselves and to others. If we accept the way things look as being reality, then it is inevitable that the grinning masks of terror shall frighten us. Whenever our comfortable assurance that we live in an orderly universe is tested by some apparent exception to the rule, it is **natural** to be frightened, **natural** to "view with alarm", **natural** to get on the defensive, **natural** to hate.

Wherever we look in the world of appearances, there we find duality. Male and female, positive and negative, good and evil. This is the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil. To eat of it is death. . . yet it is **good to look upon** and when we know how to enjoy the phantasmagoria of outward appearance, we can get as much fun out of it as children get from the comics on Sundays. More, because nothing is so funny as the way things look. The troubles we have are due largely to our mistaken belief that the way things look is the way reality actually **is**.

The world of relative appearance is necessarily full of contrast, necessarily full of incongruities. We shall always find appearances which seem at first sight to contradict our comfortable assurance that there is order and pattern, rightness and reason, behind all things.

This is the trial of duality whereby, as shown in Key 14, the Lord of the Universe tests the devout. The same Lord of the Universe is pictured in Key 15. It is for this reason that the Bible (and all other wise books) are careful to warn us not to ignore evil, not to deny the existence of the Adversary, not to pretend, in our blind optimism, that he isn't there. Yet the same wise books warn us also not to impute separate existence to the Devil, not to ascribe power to him, not to make of him (as exoteric theology has done) a second deity opposed to God—and to date, winning most of the cosmic battles.

To eat of the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil is, as we have just written, **natural**. But we are engaged in a work that takes us beyond the limitations of the natural man. Nature unaided fails, but man, who is God incarnate, is able to take his own personality and the circumstances of his environment beyond these limitations. In order that this may be brought about, he has, first of all, to **see** (Ayin, the Eye) the apparent contradictions presented by environment to his inner feeling of power. So long as nothing incongruous appears, just so long will man do nothing to improve his situation. But when he **seems** to be hemmed in, when his limitations appear to be galling chains, when he feels his bondage, then he will find a way to release. And he will find it the quicker if he learns how to laugh.

Who are the deadliest human personalities? Those who have no gift of laughter. The serious-minded, long-faced Puritans materialized their fears and visions of hell. The worst cruelties perpetrated upon man by man are those projections of the same sense, false patriotism or religious bigotry.

So, learn to laugh. To laugh at your own strutting and rantings on the stage of human life. To laugh at the bogey-men raised by the mumbo-jumbo of religious or political or economic fanaticism. To laugh at the comic spectacle of external manifestation.

One of the oldest Hindu scriptures says the manifested universe is no more than the cosmic play, the **Lila** of Brahm. This Sanskrit word is almost the exact equivalent of the hebrew **sehkoke**. The idea is that God creates, as do all artists, from the exuberance of his inner feeling. That He, like all artists, creates not only the pretty, but also the ugly, not only heroes, but also clowns and villains. And that he enjoys his cosmic play.

But the wisdom doctrine tells us also that this author of the cosmic comedy drama **lives in and through all the actors**. Not a far-away God, but an indwelling Presence, is the "Author and Finisher" of our faith. Of our confidence, that is, in the ultimate beautiful outcome of the play. Never are we closer to the Heart of God than when we play and laugh. When we deride the masks of terror, the Lover who wears them shows His beautiful face. When we laugh at our fears they vanish like mist before the morning sun.

He who loves God, laughs with God at the comic spectacle presented by appearances. He who loves man, laughs at the ineptitudes common to us all, and laughing, rises after he tumbles, as do players in a game.

Shall we give you a set of practices? God forbid! That would be altogether too funny. But if you have caught the spirit of this instruction, you shall find yourself laughing your way out of poverty, laughing your way out of disease, making the mirror of the outer world reflect your own good humor in the smiling faces of children, of men and women, and in the mastery of circumstances which is never attained save by those who consciously cultivate the gift of mirth.